

Illustrated Fantasy & Sci-Fi From The World's Greatest Artists & Writers

FRANK FRAZETTA FANTASY ILLUSTRATED

JOHN WILCO
MIKE DEAN FOSTER
MIKE GRANT
JOE HOWARD
PAULI MURPHY
BOB PASTER
JEAN MARC LOFFLER
STANLEY A.
MATT BROWN
STEVEN RUPP



\$5.99/USA \$7.75/CAN
SPECIAL EDITION
JULY 1999 • ISSUE 7
www.fifi.com

A Letter From The Publisher

Where have you gone Alex Nino and Pablo Marcos? There's a long in that question isn't there? Wherever you've been, it's great to have you back. This issue marks the return of these two classic artists to the comics scene. Each brings his distinctive style to original creations within these pages. Also spotlighted in this issue are dynamic writer/artist combinations such as the U.K.'s Alan Grant/Ian Howard, Moebius inspired combination Jean-Marc Lofficier/Timothy II and U.S. creators Matt Nixon/Steven Rupp. Also, adventures author Alan Dean Foster is back once again as he gives us a sneak peak of his new novel Phylogenesis.

We're ready to hit the highway this winter with convention stops in Atlanta (DragonCon), Chicago (Wizard World) and San Diego (Comic-Con International). Stop by and tell us what you think so far...unless you have a problem that is, then write in please. (Laughs all around) If you make it to Chicago, check out our exclusive convention edition featuring a cover painted by heavyweight artist Alex Ross. Alex gives us his interpretation of the classic Frazetta piece Spiderman.

Look for issue #8 on sale this July. Alex Nino gets busy with another all new creation as he shows us how to paint, Nino-style. On the other side of the globe Russian artist Sergey Poyarkov lends his considerable artistic talent and unique sense of interpretation to U.S. writer Matt Nixon's creation. Glasnost, anyone? Also featured are artist/writer combinations Joe Pruett/Philip Xavier as they provide a classic fantasy tale and Elio Leora/Tom Grindberg as they continue their futuristic drama Spacejockers. Seth Fisher rounds out issue #8 with a look at a primitive society's adaptation to advanced alien technology.

As always, thanks for buying this issue and enjoy!

FRANK FRAZZETTA FANTASY ILLUSTRATED

July 1999 • Volume 1, Number 7

Cover

Frank Frazetta
Indomitable

Publisher

James Breitbeil
Joe Kinsley

Art Director

James Breitbeil

Advertising Manager

Joe Kinsley

Graphic Design

Rich Ponder

Additional Graphics/Letters

Atomic Phoenix

QUANTUM CAT ENTERTAINMENT
PO BOX 10711 SAN JOSE, CA 95191-0711

Phone: (415) 299-1071 Fax: (415) 299-1071

Internet: <http://www.fantasyillustrated.com>

Subscription rates: \$29.00 per year (6 issues) in US, \$34.00 outside US.

Single issue price: \$4.95

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Printed in the USA

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Frank Frazetta Fantasy Illustrated is produced and published
monthly by Quantum Cat Entertainment, Inc. Please direct
all editorial and subscription related inquiries to:
Quantum Cat Entertainment, Inc. P.O. Box 10711, San Jose,
CA 95191-0711. One year subscription rate (6 issues) is
\$29.00. Canada \$37.00. All other countries \$54.00. All
payments in U.S. funds only. Periodicals postage paid at
San Jose, CA. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Frank Frazetta Fantasy Illustrated,
P.O. Box 10711, San Jose, CA 95191-0711.
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Printed in Canada.

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FRANK FRAZETTA'S "Indomitable"

Many times I have sat in the studio of Frank Frazetta, surrounded by a wide array of masterpieces in oil, watercolor, and pen. His wife, Elle, periodically changes the art on the walls to liven-up the room. There are a few originals, however, that Frank likes to have around him. The *GOLDEN GIRL*, *DEATH DEALER*, and the cover to *Weird Science-Fantasy* #29 are usually there. No one enjoys Frazetta art more than Frazetta! Another original that is usually present is the Conan cover known as *INDOMITABLE*. I asked Frank when he first realized that his art was special, not just the result of picking up a check and making a living. His answer was not unexpected: "It was during the Conan series that I really came into my own and realized the power and impact that I could have with a brush." *INDOMITABLE*, not surprisingly, is one of Frazetta's favorite oils. It started as a very slight watercolor study detailing a few suggestions of form with a little color and almost no background. That is all Frank needed. From that little seed of composition Frazetta furiously painted the final oil in a state of white-hot inspiration.

Frazetta saves his energy for the final product and usually expends very little effort on the study. *INDOMITABLE* is a masterpiece. This work shows Frazetta the ARTIST, the creative master of idea, raw materials, and imaginative application. The treatment is loose and painterly; the oil vibrates with living brushstrokes. Frazetta chooses to work close to the canvas and avoids heavy applications or the layering of paint and glaze. In spite of this, Frazetta achieves a wondrous depth with his oils. His canvas resonates with magically blended tints that achieve a solid presence of reality. The viewer is *THERE*; this could be happening. Frazetta infuses the paint with his own considerable life-force and we feel that power. The overall mood of this work is somewhat unsettling, even melancholy. The strange perspective heightens the effect; the viewer is looking up at savage blurry action. Conan is frenzied, imperious, yet besieged by attackers and strange, demonic creatures. For a work such as this, Frazetta would typically play classical music to establish and encourage his mood. He avoids work by Wagner or Beethoven as being too triumphant in tone. Frank wants something a little less strident. He prefers Stravinsky. The moody atmosphere lives there in the paint. Conan is lit with a shaft of light from a dying sunset. An eerie twilight beckons us.

Frazetta is a challenge. He offers us works with a distinctive combination of power and subtlety. This is a rare combination to achieve. Frazetta's best work explodes off the canvas, yet the eye and mind linger on the many virtuoso touches he adds. Frazetta combines outright entertainment with serious art. Frazetta admits that the Conan series was offered to him at just the right time. This gave him a platform to demonstrate his skill, vision and imagination. The novels of R.E. Howard had been in and out of print from the 1930's to the 1960's. Their sales figures were never great. Then along came Frazetta! All of a sudden Conan became a pop phenomenon selling in the hundreds of thousands year after year. There is little doubt that the incredible resurgence of these books was due to those incredible Frazetta covers. Frazetta sells books.

It was during this period that the legendary EC science-fiction artist, Wally Wood, walked over to Frank and said: "How does it feel to be the BEST?" I think that says it all.






COMETH THE DAWN

WRITER: MATT NIXON
ART: STEVE RUPP
COLORS: DIGITAL 8800MS

THE COLD ODORS OF RUST AND
DECAY SWEEP DOWN ON THE
NORTHERN WINDS. SHADOWS
PREPARE THEIR RETREAT AS THE
SUN BEGINS TO RISE OVER THE
DUSTY LANDSCAPE.







THE SUN SETS
ON THE LIVES OF OUR FINEST
FELLOWS TONIGHT. FIVE MEN--AND
THAT DEVIL IS STILL OUT THERE. THEIR
NUMBERS ARE SIMPLY ADDED TO THE STACK
MORE OF OUR PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN
DEVoured BY THE FEND. THE BEAR
IS A VERMIN. MOST CERTAINLY
I FEAR THE WORST...

MANTUK



MANTUK--YES--
MY SON. A SPIRIT OF
THE WORST EVIL--MINDLESS
CARNAGE REINED BY GULE
AND CUNNING.

THE SOLUTION
TO THE PROBLEM
FATHER?



MAY BE
WORSE THAN
THE PROBLEM
ITSELF.




CRUNCH
MUNCH
CRUNCH



COOL WATER CARESSSES SILKY
SKIN AS A CHILD OF NATURE
CELEBRATES THE SPLENDOR
OF IT ALL.





HE IS THE
FINEST OF THE MEN OUR TRIBE
REARED IN MANY MANY SEASONS.
IRON THAT WALKS IS NOT ONLY MY
SON, HE IS OUR FUTURE. HIS MIND IS
AN AWESOME THING RIVALED ONLY
BY HIS PURITY OF THOUGHT.
RESPECT. HONOR.
INTEGRITY.

AND THAT IS
WHY HE MUST BE
THE SACRIFICE

THAT IS TRUE
IF IT WERE TO BE A LESSER
MAN, THE POWER THAT HIS BLOOD
WOULD DRIVE HIM TO EVIL, WOULD ACTS
YOUR SON, SOUL OF THUNDER, IS THE
ONLY MAN CAPABLE OF CARRYING
THE BURDEN THAT WE ASK
HIM TO BEAR



YOU
SCARED ME!
SHAME ON
YOU!



I HAVE
TO GO
AWAY



I AM
SORRY



A SOBER JOURNEY TAKES A GRIM
TURN AS THE RISK OF DECAY PLAYS
THROUGH THE LOW CANYONS.



A SCATTERED ARRAY
OF BONE AND OFFAL
LITTERS THE GROUND.



AND A COMMITMENT OF
THE SOUL IS ABOUT TO
BE WRITTEN IN FLESH...



SHE REACHES
DEEP INSIDE THE
SOUL OF HER HOGT



AFTER SHE
BURIES HER FINGERS
INTO THE FLESH OF
HER NEW HUSBAND,
SHE FIXES ON HIS
DEEPEST DESIRES



OUR TRIBAL HISTORY
TELLS US THAT THE DUST
WOMAN IS BAD MEDICINE



AND THEN SHE GOES
FAROUT BEING THAT
THEY ARE FULFILLED



I PRAY TO THE
ANCESTORS



...GIVE
ME THE
STRENGTH!







GOOD
LUCK,
BOY.



AM I FINALLY ENTER THE CAVE
OF THE MANTUK. I CAN SMELL
THE DEATH AND ROT MIXED
WITH THE SCENTS I NOW
RECOGNIZE AS MY FRIENDS.



UNTIL NOW I NEVER
OBSERVED SMELLS
SO ACCUTELY--MY
WIFE HAS MANY
TALENTS WHICH MAKE
ME A POWERFUL MAN.





TWO... MAYBE
THREE BROKEN RIBS—
BUT... NO PAIN.



SHE IS
BIG MAGIC



RARRCHH!



GRRRAAAA!



SLASH



WITH THE STRENGTH
OF TEN HORSES, I
BURY MYSELF IN HIS
DENSE FLESH...



NO!
DID IT AGAIN?





IT IS
DONE



AND NOW
SHE FEEDS OFF
OF MY PRIDE



MY PEOPLE
ARE SAFE...



FROM THE
MUNTUK--NOT
ME AND...



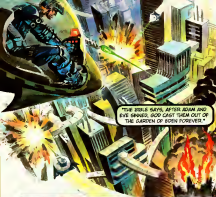
HER!



SHE IS
PUSHING ME WITH
EVERY OUNCE OF
HER WILL...

BUT
I AM IN
CONTROL

END



"THE BIBLE SAYS, AFTER ADAM AND EVE SINNED, GOD CAST THEM OUT OF THE GARDEN OF EDEM FOREVER."



"HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHAT THAT FIRST SIN WAS? A SIMPLE DISOBEDIENCE, PERHAPS."



"THE PROBLEM IS THAT WE NEVER STOPPED DOING IT. YOU WOULD HAVE THOUGHT WE WOULD HAVE LEARNED BY NOW."



"THAT'S WHY WE BUILT THE TIME MACHINE, MY HUSBAND, PETER AND I. TO GO BACK AND FIND EDEM. FIND WHAT WE HAD LOST LONG AGO."

"THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF MAN IS ONE OF VIOLENCE.
A CONTINUAL BATTLE AGAINST THE VERY FORCES
OF NATURE ITSELF. AN ORGANISM AT WAR
WITH THE VERY UNIVERSE THAT SUSTAINS IT."

"THE SO-CALLED BORN MYTH TELLS
OF US A TIME AND PLACE WHERE
THAT DICHOTOMY DID NOT EXIST."

"WHERE MAN WAS
ONE WITH NATURE."

"WHERE HE DWELLED NOT
ON THE GOOD EARTH..."

PRIMO
MORDO

"...BUT WITH
IT IS ONE."



"HE UNDERSTOOD
THE FUNDAMENTAL..."



"... STRUGGLE OF
LIFE AND DEATH..."

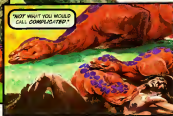


"... AND ACCEPTED IT
FOR WHAT IT WAS."

"IT WAS ABOUT BASIC SURVIVAL,
NOT ABOUT GOOD VERSUS
EVIL OR ANY SUCH BALDRY."



"HE WAS ABOUT
LIVING. THAT'S ALL."



"NOT WHAT YOU WOULD
CALL COMPLICATED."

"INTO THIS NEW WORLD WE
CAME, UNINVITED, UNPREPARED
AND CERTAINLY UNWANTED."





LET
HEM
GO!

IT'S
CRUSHING
ME!!

"I WAS SCARED SALLY. PETER
WAS BEING TAKEN FROM ME AND
I WAS HELPLESS TO STOP IT."



DAMN IT!
DAMN IT!

SAVE
YOURSELF, BARRY
AASHAN!



"THEN THE
CAVALRY ARRIVED.
IT WAS HEARING
A LOINCLOTH."

WHA?
WHO?

"IT WAS THE BRAVEST
THING I HAD EVER SEEN."



"HE BEAT THE DAMN SNAKE. NOW
THEY WAS A TWIST TO THE OLD
STORY. ARAM BEAT THE SNAKE."



OH, GOD,
PETER! IS HE
ALL RIGHT?

"HE NEVER
UTTERED
A SOUND."

"THANK
YOU, INACRIVER,
YOU ARE

"PETER!
ARE YOU ALL
RIGHT?"



COUGH!

"FEEL LIKE I
SWALLOWED A
GALLON OF
WATER."

"THANK GOD
HE GOT TO YOU
IN TIME!"

"WHO?
WHO GOT
TO ME?"

"HE'S
GONE!"

"WHO'S
GONE? WHO DID
YOU MEET?"

"A PREHISTORIC
MAN. HE DROVE INTO
THE WATER AND SAVED
YOU FROM THE
SNAKE."

"A MAN!
PATH THAT'S
IMPOSSIBLE. WE ARE
TOD FAR BACK IN TIME
FOR MAN TO HAVE
EVOLVED."



GRRRRR!

"CAN WE
DISCUSS THIS
LATER?"

"RIGHT NOW I
THINK WE HAVE TO BE
SOMEPLACE ELSE...
FAST!"



"WE DISAPPEARED FOR THE
HIGH GROUND. PRETTY
MUCH LIKE OUR TREE
DWELLING ANCESTORS
HAD LEARNED TO DO
MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO."

"HOLY
SHIT!"

"I DON'T
BELIEVE THIS IS
HAPPENING!"



"WELL
AHM
THAT?"

"THAT
WAS
WHY
TOO
CLOSE!"



"WHAT
DO WE DO
NOW?
WE'RE
TRAPPED
IN THE PAST
SURROUNDED
BY BEASTS LIKE
THAT! IT'S ONLY A
MATTER OF TIME
FOR US."



"WE'RE
GOING TO
SURVIVE! NO
MATTER
WHAT!!
YOU EVEN
THINK ABOUT GIVING
UP AND I'LL HAND FEED
YOU TO THAT THING
MYSELF."

"MY CRUDE SWORD MUST HAVE
PENETRATED THROUGH TO THE
CREATURAL'S BONE. IT WAS THE FIRST
GOOD LUCK WE'D GOTTEN THIS FAR."



"WE HAD TO TAKE ADVANTAGE
OF IT WHILE WE COULD."



"FAITH!
WHY ARE
YOU DOING?"

"GETTING
US FOOD, I
HOPE."

"BUT THERE
MAY BE MORE
OF THOSE THINGS
NEARBY."

"EXACTLY
WHICH IS WHY WE
HAVE TO HURRY! ARE YOU
GOING TO GIVE ME A
HAND OR NOT?"

"I FOUND A SHARP ROCK
AND STARTED FILETING US A
COUPLE OF BNG, JORDY STEAKS."



OH, I'M
COOKING

"UNFORTUNATELY WE WEREN'T
THE ONLY ONES LOOKING
FOR A FREE LUNCH."



OH, HELLO
BACK OFF
KITTY!

"ENTER OUR GLEY
SAVOR ONCE AGAIN."



YOU!

WHAT?
IS THAT THE
SO-CALLED
CAVEMAN
YOU SAW
EARLIER?

"OH, I TOOK OFF A CHUNK OF MEAT
AND JUST LAME THAT I KNEW NOT
ONLY WHAT HE CALLED HIMSELF
BUT WHAT HIS INTENT WAS."



HA, HA

WHAT'S
HE UP TO?
THE GUY LOOKS
LIKE IT'S NOTHING
FOR HIM

IT IS

"ALL I HAD TO DO WAS
LET MY HAND BE STILL
AND THINGS JUST CAME
TO ME. IT WAS WORKED
AND YET IT FELT
PERFECTLY NATURAL."



HE'S GOING
TO FEED IT
AND IT KNOWS
THAT. SEE?





FAITH
WHAT THE ABEL
IS GOING ON HERE?
AM I LOOSING MY MIND?
NONE OF THIS SHOULD
BE HAPPENING.

I KNOW,
CHUCK. BUT I
THINK WE JUST
HAVE TO GIVE
IT TIME.
COME ON,
HELP ME FINISH
UP HERE.

"THE SUN SET TO A STYgian DARKNESS
AND I WAS GRATEFUL. WE HAD MANAGED
TO GET A FIRE GOING. THE MEAT
WAS CHERRY BUT NOURISHING."

FROM THE
ANIMALS AND
VEGETATION, THIS
IS CLEARLY THE
PALEOZOIC.
NO
QUESTION ABOUT
THAT. BUT THAT
MAN... HE'S ALMOST
MONO SENSITIVE.
IT DOESN'T
ADD UP.

I DON'T
THINK SCIENCE
IS THE RIGHT
APPROACH HERE.
EVER SINCE WE
ARRIVED, I'VE FELT MY
CONSCIOUSNESS GROWING
AS IF IT WERE EXPANDING
BEYOND THE MORTAL
BOUNDARIES OF
MY SENSES.

THAT SOUNDS
LIKE SOME RETARDED
NEW AGE ALIEN JUNK. FAITH,
WE'RE SCIENTISTS. WE'VE
COME BACK IN TIME TO
TRY AND SAVE
THE FUTURE.

YES, BUT
WHAT IF THE
ANSWER TO THAT
SALVATION IS SOMETHING
SO PRIMAL, SO BASIC, OUR
SOPHISTICATED INTELLECTS HAVE
LOST THE ABILITY TO
RECOGNIZE IT FOR
WHAT IT IS?

"POOR PETER, HE WAS TRYING
HIS BEST TO UNDERSTAND, BUT HIS
THOUGHTS WOULDN'T BE QUIET LONG
ENOUGH TO AWEAR THE REAL WORLD."

WITHOUT A
WORKING HYPOTHESIS
AND AMPLIFIED TESTING,
HOW CAN WE KNOW
ANYTHING?
SCIENCE
IS THE ONLY
WAY TO DISCERN
WHAT IS REAL
AND WHAT
IS NOT.

I
WISH TO
THINK SO.
BUT NOW
THAT LIMITS OUR
TRUE ABILITIES
TO CORRELATE WITH
THE ENVIRONMENT,
AND SOMEHOW
ON THE SAVANNAH...
IS THE KEY TO
ALL OF THIS.

NO! I
STILL THINK HE'S
DANGEROUS.
FAITH,
WE HAVE TO
STAY AWAY FROM
HIM. NOW I'M
TIRED. LET'S
GET SOME
SLEEP.

"I KNOW PETER WAS WRONG. THERE
WAS SALVATION HERE IF WE ONLY
HAD THE COURAGE TO SEEK IT OUT.
TO FIND IT AND TO EMBRACE IT."

"I KNEW WHERE TO FIND HIM.
ALL I HAD TO DO IS OPEN MY
MIND AND FOLLOW THE PATH."

"NEITHER OF US SAID A WORD
OR HAD NEVER SEEN A WOMAN.
LET ALONE IMAGINE ONE.
IT WAS THE RIGHT TIME."

"EVERY THOUGHT I HAD WAS HIS
AND VICE VERSA. I HAD NEVER
KNOWN SUCH COMPLETE NAKEDNESS."

"IT WAS BOTH FRIGHTENING AND
EXHILARATING. IT WAS PURE
DESIRE. IT WAS COMPLETE
NEED. AND, YES, IT WAS LOVE."

"IT WAS
EVERYTHING!"

"I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED WHAT
WOULD HAPPEN NEXT. HOW PETER
WOULD FEEL WHEN HE AWOKES
AND I WASN'T THERE."

FAITH!
WHERE ARE
YOU?

"FORGET THE FEEL OF BLOOD ALONE
THEN THE WORRY AND DOWRY
ALL RUSH AT US AT ONCE."

FAITH!!

"OF COURSE HE FOUND US
EASILY ENOUGH AND I SAW THE
ANGRY MOURT IN HIS EYES."

PETER!
PLEASE, IT'S
NOT WHAT YOU
THINK!

OH NO
FAITH

"IT WAS ALL THERE GOING UNWALLORED BY
MATE: THE FEELING OF BETRAYAL IMMEDIATELY
REPLACED BY A NEED FOR BLOOD."

HOW
COULD
YOU??!

PETER!
NO!!

"IT WAS AS IF ALL THE MANDLESS VIOLENCE OF
HISTORY WAS ABOUT TO BE BORN IN THAT
MOMENT AND PETER WOULD BE ITS CREATOR."

"PETER DREW BLOOD AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE, OW CRIED OUT IN PAIN."



"PETER! LISTEN TO ME! YOU'RE STARTING IT! DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?"

"ALL THE BLOODLETTING! THE WAR! MAN BECOMING A KILLER!"



"OW WAS STRONGER THAN PETER BUT HE TRULY WASN'T FIGHTING BACK. HE KNEW WHAT I WAS TRYING TO DO AND WAS GIVING ME MY CHANCE - AND PETER'S AS WELL."



"YOU ARE NOT A KILLER!"

"THIS IS WRONG, NO MATTER WHAT THE REASON!"



"THAT IS WHAT THIS PLACE IS ALL ABOUT, PETER. EITHER WE CHOOSE LOVE OR WE LET THE SAME OLD FUTURE HAPPEN AGAIN."

"BUT THIS TIME IT WILL BE ON YOUR - ON OUR HANDS, PETER. YOURS AND MINE."



"AND JUST LIKE THAT HE STOPPED AND I KNEW WE HAD WON. NOT ONLY THE THREE OF US HERE IN PARADISE, BUT ALL THE REST TO COME."

"OH, GOD, FATH. I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. HELP ME, PLEASE!"



WE HAVE A CHANCE TO START FRESH TO BUILD A TRUE CIVILIZATION TO FORGO THE BLOODSHED AND BEAT ALL THE EVIL YET TO COME.

YOU REALLY BELIEVE WE CAN DO THAT?

WITH OM'S HELP, YES. I THINK WE CAN SHOW TO THAT DREAM.



WHAT IS HE SAYING?

NO, BUT I THINK HE HAS AN INTERESTING RELATIONSHIP WITH AOM.

"AND SO IT BEGAN AGAIN. IT WAS IF THE SUITS HAD ACTUALLY BEEN NIPED CLEAN AND THE FUTURE RISK FORGOTTEN."

"SLOWLY PETER BEGAN TO QUIET THE OLD VOICES IN HIS SOUL AND ALLOW OM TO BREATHE A NEW SPIRIT IN IT ONE OF PEACE AND HARMONY."

"OUR LIVES WERE HAPPY AND CONTENT. THEN ONE DAY, PETER AWOKE IT WAS TIME TO MOVE ON TO THE NEXT STAGE OF NEW EON."



"WE'LL MISS YOU, PETER. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF."

"IF ALL GOES WELL, I'LL TRY TO COME BACK IN THE SPRING. I PROMISE."



"THIS PLACE IS NOT ABOUT SCIENCE OR MIRACLES. IT GOES WITH EACH OTHER. ONCE PETER AND I LEARNED ONE'S TRUTH, IT ALL FELL INTO PLACE."

"HA, THANK YOU. FISH YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE A VERY GOOD SUPPER."



"TAKE ONLY WHAT YOU NEED AND IT, NATURE, GOD, WHATEVER, WILL TAKE CARE OF THE REST."

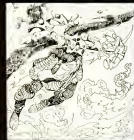
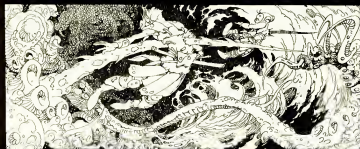


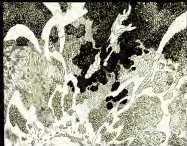
"HELLO, MY NAME IS PETER."

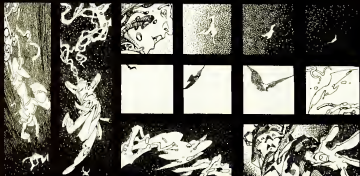
THE END

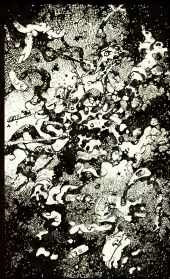






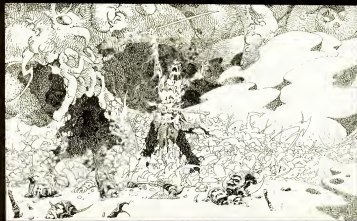














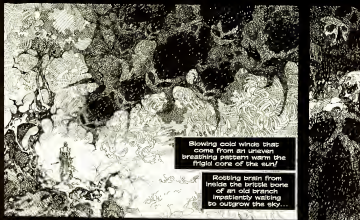
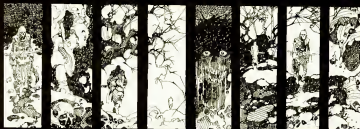


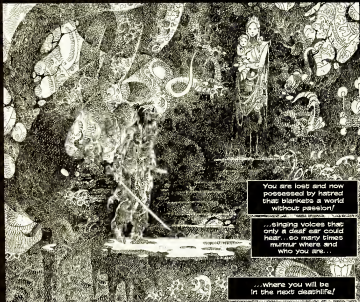




In a place where no
one ever came close
to dreaming about...a
place created from a
foaming brain, there is
a tiny ripple of truth
that duplicates sanity
so reality...existence of
self-pity and triumph!

This is a long gone
dream in which only
lost souls find mercy
from a god of
an insane creation!





You are lost and now
possessed by hatred
that blankets a world
without passion!

...singing voices that
only a deaf ear could
hear...so many times
murmur where and
who you are...

...where you will be
in the next deathlife!





Yes, I've been
a dreamer of
bad thoughts!

No dry earth is
ready to shed
tears for me...







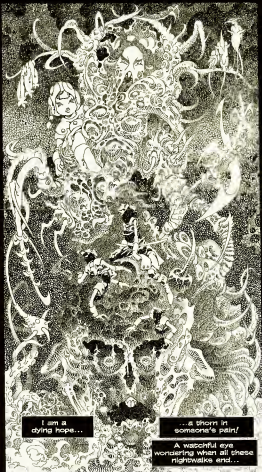
Numb to being alone...
no wish to come home!

...somewhere, sometime,
a two faced fortune will
fall...from here to there.
I will still be nowhere!



I say life is taboo
and worth leaving!

Now I feel supreme...
I'm ready to open
my eyes...



I am a
dying hope...

...a thorn in
someone's pain!

A watchful eye
wondering when all these
nightwalks end...





You're not
scared...good!

I gotta go...
I'm not here
to stay...

...I'm just
passing by!

The End

HELL COMES TO ELE-TOWN



I PRIGGIN
HATE ELVES.

GRAY, SO IT AIN'T EXACTLY P.E. SO WHYY?
ELVES ARE PRISSEY, FUSSEY, KUTSEY AMP...
JUST TOO DAMNED NICE. THEY SIT AROUND
ALL DAY CHOMPING ON FLY AGARIC AND
THITTERING AMONG THEMSELVES. THAT'S
ENOUGH TO GET THEM ANNIHILATED
BY ANY ONE OF A DOZEN GUYS I KNOW.

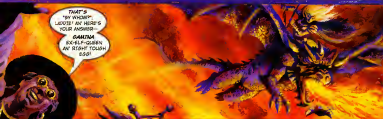
OF COURSE, I KNEW THIS
TO MYSELF. I LEARNED A
LONG TIME AGO WHEN TO
KEEP MY BIG MOUTH SHUT.

CREATED BY
ALAN GRANT JON HAWARD
WRITER ARTIST
©1995 KODICORP INC.

BESIDES, HE WERE GETTING
PAID TO DO A JOB. WHERE I
COME FROM, MONEY'S MORE
IMPORTANT THAN BEE
(ONLY SLIGHTLY, THOUGH...)









AND I
DREAD TO
THINK WHAT EVIL
THEY PRACTISE
THERE!

LEGEND SAYS THE TREASURE'S
ONLY VISIBLE TO LIVING THINGS
ON ONE DAY EACH YEAR.

TAKA, YA LITTLE
DWARF! IN THE NAME
OF SAMPAK, LORD OF ALL
EVIL - WHERE'S THE
FABLED TREASURE OF
THE ELVES?

TO YOUR
WORST, FOUL DREAM!
YOU SHALL NEVER
LEARN OUR
SECRET!



WE'LL
SEE!

FRZZZ!
AIEEE!!



WELL..?

OO-ER!
TELL HIM,
SIRE - OR I'LL
BE NEXT!



THOUGH
THIS KILLING SECRET'S
IN, SAMPAK, MY LIPS
STAY SEALED!

WE ELVES ARE
SIMPLY PEACEFUL FOLK
WE'VE WILLING TO FORGIVE
AND FORGET - IF ONLY YOU'LL
END THIS CORNAGE
NOW!



no.



AAAAH!

FRZZZ!



YOU'RE
MORT.
MORT.

ALL
RIGHT - Y-HO!
WIN! I-HOT THAT I'M
AFRAID OF YOU - BUT
I - SEE, CAN STOMACH
NO MORE OF THIS
BARBARITY!

GIVE ME
MY BOMB-POOD
AND I WILL TELL
YOU ALL



TAKE
FIRST.



NO-ONE KNOWS
WHERE THE TREASURE LIES -
FOR EACH YEAR, IT IS DUNG
UP AND RE-BURIED BY
BLIND ELVES.

BUT TOMORROW
THERE IS AN ECLIPSE
OF THE SUN - A SHINY
RAY OF LIGHT WILL
POINT THE WAY!



SAY
PLEASE

PLEASE

PRETTY
PLEASE

PRETTY
PLEASE!



THAT'S ANOTHER REASON I DON'T
LIKE ELVES. THEY'RE ADDICTED TO
THAT STINKY STUFF!

HA HA HA!

HA HA HA!

CARLOS SAID HE HAD TO GET THE HOUNDS OUT OF THE PALACE BEFORE THE ECLIPSE, SO HE SLEPT UNDER THE STONES AND HIT THE SLAVES WITH THE BEING SUN-

ALEXANDER THE MACCABEAN HAD ZAPPED US WITH A SPELL OF INVISIBILITY--

HELL, I CAN SCREW THE TREASURE! IT'S THE SLF-BASES I WANT!



ALEXANDER MIGHT SAY IT WAS ONLY TEMPORARY, THOUGH--

CHEEES!

HELLFIRE
THEY'VE BEEN
LIES!

EVERYBODY KNOWS ME!
JES IS A WASTE OF LIFE - IT
CAN'T BE PIECED BY
ANY WEAPON!
DO YOUR
WORST, YOU DEMON
GLORIOUS!



PICKLE BILLY WAS A DRUNKEN GAF. NOBODY WAS GOING TO MISS HIM. PLUS, HIS DEATH MEANT MORE OF THE REWARD WOULD BE SHARED BETWEEN US--



THEY'RE
ATTACKING!
SIGNAL
THE CITY-BOSS!

RRROOARRR



ONLY, SO I HAD TO REVISE MY
OPINION OF ELVES SINCE GAMMA
CAME ON THE SCENE. CUTE CHICK!

HE AND HER COULD GET UP
TO A LOT OF INTERESTING HARRY
PARRY - AND I HAV'N'T TALKED ABOUT
GROWIN' TOMSTOOLS, NEITHER!

UP AND
AT 'EM, ME
BUDDOS!



THE BATTLE RAGED ALL MORNING
AND HALF THE AFTERNOON--



BUT I HAVE TO SAY, THE
BEST OF US DID OUR BIT--

GIMMA WAS
POETRY IN MOTION--



HURDER,
BEGROOT SQUELCH
THEM HURDER!



DOES THAT
GUY NEVER
SPEAK?

ONLY WHEN
HE HAS SOMETHING
TO SAY, HE
HEARTY!



...DONT
THAT SO
GREATLY?



WE BEAT THEM
BACK TO THE PALACE--

SLAMM!

AND WHEN THEY
SLAMMED THE GATES
BEHIND THEM--

ALEXANDER SHOWED
HE AIN'T CALLED HANGGAP
FOR NOTHING--

IT WAS MY BUNDA FIGHT.
NHEE-DEEP IN GUTS AND BLOOD.
WE TROUNCED THESE EVIL
BASTARD'S ASSES--

TASTE
THE FLAME,
ELF-BITCH!

THAT'S ONE
FOR YOU
BIG BOY!

SLAMM!

HEY! LOOKS LIKE
THE SAMURAI'S GOING
TO SPEAK!

ALUK!

ALUK!
ALUK!
ALUK!

"ALUK!"
NOW
WHAT THE HELL
DOES THAT
MEAN, P

WARR
AN BELAY!
SHADDOW
HERRSELF!

GAZE UPON
ME, WORMS!

AND
DIE!

K'ZAMMM!



WE WERE OUT OF IT - ALL EXCEPT
ALEXANDER THE MAGGREAT - AND
GAMMA'S DRAGON.



NOT EVEN THE DRAGON'S
MIGHT AND FLEET BREATH COULD
DEFT SHADOW'S REMORSE.



FOR AN HOUR OR MORE, THEY TOILED AND
STRAWLED, EACH STRIVING FOR ADVANTAGE,
BUT NEITHER
RECEIVING ANY--



THEN GAMMA STEPPED IN, GOTTA
HAND IT TO HER - I LIKE A BAWE
WHO FIGHTS DIRTY.

SCA,
MONSTER!



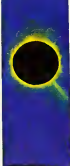
A THOUSAND THANKS,
GAMMA! WE KNOW YOU, YET
YOU SELFLESSLY CAME BACK TO
SAVE US. TRULY YOU ARE AN
BEE OF BRAVERY!

NOW OUR
ANCIENT TREASURES
IS SAFE AGAIN!



I WOULDN'T
SET ON THAT,
SHORTY!

WAPP!





ALIVE!

WHAT'S HE SAYING?

I THINK HE WANTS IT!



NO SAIL FIRST, LIPS AND LUGGERS!

NO WAY! ME AND BIGFOOT WERE HERE FIRST! SOMEONE WHO SAYS 'OFTENT CAN FIGHT IT OUT WITH ME!



THE DEAL'S AT AN END!

I'VE WANTED TO DO THIS FOR YEARS. YOU BAD-TEMPERED BEAM!



I FIGURED IT WAS TIME FOR ME TO BREAK MY SILENCE--

THAT LITTLE BEAM! I'VE HAD AS MUCH AS I CAN STAND FROM YOU!

HEY, WHAT ARE YOU DOING? YOU'RE SWORN TO SERVE ME FOREVER!



I GUESS ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL. AFTER SOME GENTLE PERSUASION WE LEFT THEM WITH THEIR SHARE OF THE TREASURE.



WHILE ME AND GANNON WENT OFF IN SEARCH OF A FIVE-STAR INN WITH ROOM SERVICE, A SWIMMING POOL--

AND NO FEICKIN' BOATS.

THE END!

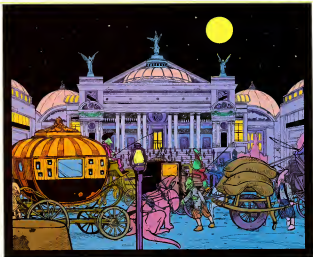
"PHANTOM OF WHICH OPERA?"

STORY BY R. B. J. M. LOFFICIER • ART BY TIMOTHY II

ALFAZ THE CITY OF A
THOUSAND LEGENDS

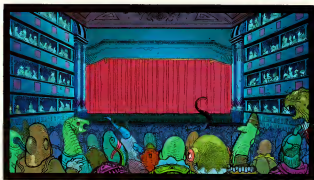
THIS IS ONE OF THEM...

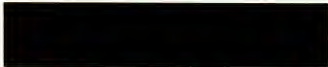


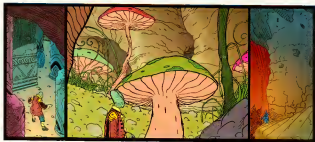


















FIN

Phylogenesis

an escape by
Alan Dean Foster
art by Mark Frazee

To be published in the monthly
Del Rey in June 1999



He was the first of the four adventurous ones to present himself at the designated assembly point. The others arrived soon after. The meteorologist was there, as was a senior structural engineer. The third member of the group was a young female sanitation worker who went by the dulcet patronymic of Jyeshtharun. Focusing himself to ignore the more interesting conversation of the two high-level researchers, he gravitated toward the only one of the group with whom he might instantly be expected to bond.

He would much rather have discussed their situation and prospects with the two scientists, but joining in an ongoing discussion with two such cerebral heavyweights was just the sort of misstep that could call his carefully constructed false identity into question. As it turned out, he was only mildly disappointed. Jyeshtharun was lively, personable, far more attractive than either of the two senior tools, and did not rank his job classification. It did not take much of an effort on his part to settle readily onto the bench alongside hers.

"This is so exciting!" Light from overhead sparkled in her eyes. He observed that the red bands that streaked the predominant gold of her multiple lenses shaded delicately to pink. "Ever since the existence of the bipeds was acknowledged by the government I've dreamed of working closely with them. That's why I applied for a position here. But I never imagined I would ever have the opportunity of actually living among them as well."

"Why?"

She gestured uncertainly. "Why what?"

"Why do you want to work and live among them?" Beneath them, the transport shifted slightly as it backed out of the loading bay and moved toward a tunnel whose terminus he knew from a previous visit.

"I've always liked new things," she replied. "Anything new. When I heard about this, it seemed like the newest thing there could be."

He looked away from her, scrutinizing the tunnel ahead. "You sound like you should be an artist."

"Oh, no!" She seemed shocked at the notion. "For that you need a constructive imagination. Mine is purely deductive. I have no aesthetic discipline at all. But I'm very good at what I do."

"You must be," he told her, "or you would not have been chosen for this transfer."

"I know." She undulated personal pride. "I'm proud of my skills, even if my position is a lovely one."

"Not at all," he chided her. "Mine is lower still. In essence we are both laborers in the same discipline: biology. I work one end, and you the other."

To make the mild vernacular work he was forced to employ a couple of whistles in High Thraeta. It took her several moments for comprehension to dawn, but when it did her gesture of amusement was highly appreciative. As always, he knew that he would have to be circutal not to reveal too much of his truest self. Avaricious food preparations rarely made use of High Thraeta, which was not a difficult but a second language whose use was largely reserved for the learned.

The journey through the tunnel seemed to go on forever. Certainly he did not remember it taking half so long on his previous visit. When questioned, the transport driver could only say that he was taking them to the destination decreed on his manifest. What would happen to them after they arrived at their destination he did not know.

After what felt like an interminable journey the transport pulled into a dock unlike any Des had seen before. All thrax facilities were spotless, but this one gleamed as if it was scoured down every other time-part. Security was noticeably prominent. The travelers were escorted off the transport, rapid attention being paid to scientists and support workers. Unthemed into a clean room, their bodies and personal luggage were minutely inspected, scanned, probed, and analyzed. Desvendapur would have been uneasy had he not observed that Jiy was even more nervous. Was she too the manufacturer and possessor of a false identity?

No, that was absurd, he told himself. As ever, he needed to be wary of slipping into paranoia. The flow of them were going to be working in clean quarters with humans

What more natural than that they should be profoundly screened?

Still, the procedures being followed struck him as excessive. After all, he had experienced close contact with one of the bipeds without any preprocessing whatsoever, to the detriment of neither. But that contact had been uncritical.

He had anticipated the inspection and review would last a few time-parts at most. It occupied the better part of three days, during which time the four assignees were kept isolated not only from humans but from all other thrax, except those immediately involved in their commotion. At the end of that period they were directed to board another transport. Des noted that it was not independently powered, but instead was mounted on magnetic repulsion strips. That suggested a high-speed journey, and a much longer one than he had expected.

He was moved to query the official marching alongside him. She had a silver star and two subsidiary berils embedded in the collar of her right upper shoulder. "Where are we going? Why the rapid transport?" He gestured with a whisker. "The human sector is right over there somewhere."

"The Gesswain sector is," the escort agreed. "But you four have not been assigned to Gesswain. You're going to the project."

"The project?" Striding along just behind the poet, Jyeshtharun was fixating intently. "The project on Hivehom. They didn't tell us."

"No point in keeping it a secret now. I envy you," the escort murmured. "You will have the opportunity to meet and interact with the famous first-contact supervisor, the First Ryourenmaster. Quite an honor."

"I've never been offworld." Desvendapur's mind was spinning. Space-plus travel itself—the experience of journeying between different star systems—should provide marvelous fodder for composition. And then there was the opportunity to live and work with members of the original project, set up soon after the first tentative thrax-human contact was established.

"Neither have I." The escort gestured appropriately as they reached the portal that provided entrance to the transport. "Nor is it likely I will ever be. But I am grateful for the opportunity to work here and contribute to interspecies understanding."

"How many humans have you met?" Des asked as he stepped into the waiting vehicle. "How many have you dealt with?"

"None." The escort stood stiffly to one side as they boarded, all four arms upraised in salute. "I am with Security. Our job is to keep the wandering curious away from the humans, not to interact with them. But there is still the satisfaction of contributing. Sweet traveling to you."

Anticipation surged through Desvendapur as he settled his abdomen over a vacant bench, straddling it expectantly. Very soon thereafter, the transport began to move, picking up speed as it rose above the ship and roared toward an unknown destination. No, not exactly unknown, he told himself. There would be a ship waiting, a thrax to lift them into orbit. There they would board a ship for the journey through space-plus to Hivehom, the thrax's homeworld and the location of the project.

For someone who had hoped only to meet another human or two in their own environment, events were moving along encouragingly indeed.

There were no signs to identify the station where they eventually disembarked, and no crowds to query insignia and attitude indicated that they had arrived at a military as opposed to a commercial facility, a supposition that further inspection and scrutiny confirmed.

Everything was going so well that Desvendapur was unprepared when the processor standing on the other side of the railing looked up from his readout to declare calmly but firmly, "Desvendapur? There's no Desvendapur in this file."

The poet's blood went colder than it had on the day he had stumbled inadvertently outside the Gesswain hive and into the accumulated rith above. The new identity he had

worked so long and hard to construct seemed to evaporate like a puff of perfumed plasma, leaving him standing exposed and revealed in every set of compound eyes in the facility. But no one was looking in his direction, no one was staring at him accusingly. Yet.

"There must be a mistake. I made proper application and have been passed on through to this point without any difficulty." He struggled to keep his antennae from swishing, fought to conceal the fear that was raging through him.

The processor was not impressed. He was a senior, his chitin shading heavily to purple, but he was still alert and in full possession of his faculties. He replied without looking up from the readout.

"That is why a hive has multiple layers of security. What slips past one can be caught by another." There was nothing Desvendapaur could do but stand and wait. Having passed on to the next station, a puzzled Jey walked back to see what was taking so long. When Des explained, he became silent.

"What nonsense is this? Of course this male belongs. He is one of four assigned to this duty. No—hushed by this duty."

"Really, Jey." He did his best to quiet her, looking around uneasily. Drawn to the connection, the two scientists who had already been cleared had paused at the top of the landing to look back. The one thing Des did not seek in his present incarnation was attention. "In rare it will sort itself out."

She gazed at him out of eyes that were a fluxed composite of shattered mirrors. "You shouldn't let him treat you like this, Des. You are special now. All four of us are." She eyed the processor sternly. "Regardless of our individual job classifications."

The elderly drone remained unperturbed. "Procedures must be followed. Otherwise you do not have a hive, you have anarchy. If he is not in the file, then it admits of an irregularity, irregularities must be resolved."

"I am sure this one will be." The post made short, sweeping, soothing gestures with both inhands. "It has to be some sort of administrative error."

"No." The processor was adamant. "There is no Desvendapaur registered here." A inhand marched toward a communicative. "I will have to summon a superior—and Security."

Tussling with a couple of warriors with oversized mandibles would not get him a cubicle on the waiting starship. Des knew. There was nothing he could do but stand and wait. Wait, he feared, for the inevitable—for that which he had succeeded in putting off for more than a year.

"I do not understand," if Desvendapaur was distressed, Jeywharuran was openly baffled. "He has been working at Desvend here for some time. That is a security-sensitive area, and there has been no difficulty. Why should there be a confusion now? It's not as if he is laboring for military intelligence or energy research. He works in food processing."

"It does not matter," declared the processor with finality. "A security breach is a security breach, no matter what the status of the..." He halted in midreprobation. "Food preparation?"

"Eighth-level assistant," Desvendapaur supplied quickly.

The processor clicked sharply, his mandibles grinding together just so. "The file lists you as a food synthesizer. That is a much more dignified designation."

"I completely agree," Des told him, "but it is not one that applies to me, I am only an assistant preparator." Leaning forward, he tried to steal a glimpse of the readout, and failed. It was aimed only to the eyes of the processor. Digits moved and the readout changed. Desvendapaur remanded himself to breathe.

"Ah, here it is." The drone's tone did not change. "Desvendapaur, Assistant food preparator, level eight. You may proceed to the next checkpoint."

"That's it?" The challenge emerged of its own

accord. "After all that?"

"After all what?" The processor eyed him curiously. "It was a simple filing error. I was doing my job."

He would have to learn to accept such things in stride, a relieved Desvendapaur told himself. His identity had not been compromised—only momentarily misapplied. With Jey leading the way, he advanced to the next station, ready now for whatever challenge it might present.

He need not have concerned himself. At each successive checkpoint his presence was acknowledged and his legitimacy confirmed. If he had been at all worried about the integrity of his newly wrought identity, two days of processing did much to lay his concerns to rest.

They were housed together until the following morning, when they were due to lift off via atmospheric shuttle. Writing in high orbit was the space-plus transport Zenaridom. No one had officially told them they were going to Hiveshom, and no one had said that was where the project was located.

He tried to prepare himself mentally for the voyage ahead. His first journey offworld should be good for a kelo at least. Then would come the descent to an entirely new planet, the ancestral homeworld of the thrans. Finally there would be, at long last, extended and intimate contact with the extraordinary bipedal mammals called humans. His sleeping chamber was comfortable enough, but he hardly slept at all. Mornings brought with it an excitement that was as difficult to contain as it was to quantify. He was pleased to note that the two scientists, far from being intellectually or emotionally above such simple emotions, were as visibly excited as food preparator and sanitation worker.

They boarded the shuttle via a long access ramp. At no time were they exposed to the outside, but that was perfectly natural. Very little of a hive beyond parks and recreational sites, was located on the surface. The atmospheric shuttle itself was of modest dimensions, long and low. Brief preflight instruction was given; no one materialized to offer good-byes or farewells; and before he really had time to inspect his surroundings, Desvendapaur found himself airborne and thundering toward orbit.

Offworld, there were no ports on the government transport, but by utilizing the seat controls he was able to call up a three-dimensional projection of the external view in any direction. He saw Willow-Wane receding below him and the firmament of stars and worlds and other species—primitive and intelligent, familiar and alien—drawing infinitesimally closer. Within him fresh inspiration shimmered but did not boil. That would come with constant contact, he felt. When he was surrounded by alien bipeds, by humans dwelling in their own facilities, that was when the river of enlightenment would wash over him to cleanse him of the puerile, classical heritage of traditional thrans rhythmic narrative.

He had studied hard, had prepared for this his whole life. What it was permitted to know, he had absorbed, from available records and reports. He knew how humans lived, but that was not the same as living with and among them. He knew how they were supposed to smell, but that was not the same as smelling them. He knew how they moved, how their peculiarly restricted speech patterns sounded, how they viewed the universe out of undersized single-lensed eyes, how their digestive systems worked to process not only normal food but dead animal products as well. All these things he knew, but studying them in recordings and reading about them in second- and third-hand reports was not the same thing as experiencing them for himself.

Furthermore, almost all of it was knowledge that had been gained under controlled conditions. Even the standpoint of an artist as opposed to a scientist, he valued his single, brief, dangerous encounter with the lone human in the rift above Desvend more than all the recorded lore he had assimilated. How he was going to duplicate and expand upon that under the controlled conditions of the project, he did not know. He only knew that it was necessary, even vital, to the maturation of his art. Somehow he would make it happen. But first they had to get there.

When the Zen made the jump from normal space to

sounds for what he believed to be a modestly successful trip-
pound stomp. Realizing that it undoubtedly duplicated, in
spirit if not in actual phonology, a hundred similar initial
deep-space experiences, he promptly discarded the entire
recorder tape. He had not come this far, had not lived and grown-
ed and lowered himself and abandoned the patrimony of his
hive, to greet old pale imitations of the work of others who
had gone before him. He sought the unique, the new, the dis-
tinctive. That would not be found in duplicating the obvious
experiences of predecessors.

As the journey through distorted space-time pro-
gressed he came to know his fellow travelers better. Though
he focused his attention on Rhymer and the two sci-
entists who had also been assigned to the project, he did not
neglect the other passengers or those members of the crew
who found time to spend with an inquisitive lower-level pas-
senger. He parroted everything. A true artist disliked noth-
ing, never knowing from where true inspiration might arise.
So he acquired and stored away information on topics as
diverse as hydrological engineering and starship mainte-
nance, not neglecting the area of food preparation, in which
he could boast some expertise.

They were two eight-days out and he was sleeping
soundly in his private cubicle when he heard the noise. It was
a muffled creaking, repeated at regular intervals. Since the
components of a thruster vessel fit together seamlessly, it was
difficult to imagine what might be causing noise sufficient to
wake him. As he regained consciousness, lying in the dark on
the low sleeping bench, he listened intently to the soft, uncer-
tain sounds. He did not have to open his eyes because they
were always open. He had only to struggle to pull together
the constituent bits and pieces of his consciousness.

The subtle shushing was produced by the move-
ment of clothing against the body of its wearer. But it was not
the slick rush of slacks protective attire against smooth, hard
chairs. The noise that had awakened him was more subtle,
almost as if cloth were being dragged across water.

Looking up, he saw the shape looming over him. In
the twilight that filled the cubicle it was enormous and un-
usually human. From his studies Des knew that specific
bipeds varied considerably in size, as opposed to other super-
ior species like the AAnn whose individual physical dimensions were relatively consistent. This one was
at least twice as big as the solitary male he had encountered
in the exposed air of Geswint. An enormous waterfall of tan-
gled black hair sprouted from its face and head to hang down
over the upper portion of its chest and shoulders. Its eyes
were black and protruding.

Its immense five-digit hands, of which the con-
struction had only two, grasped a shiny length of projection-stad-
d metal that was vaguely ominous in outline. The creature
wore a heavy jacket of some dark-colored material and match-
ing pants, and its single pair of feet were shod in calf-high
black boots fashioned from some grained, reflective
material.

Towering above his bed, it glared down at him,
showing the even, white teeth that served the same function
as normal mandibles. Its entire aspect was quietly intimidat-
ing. No empathic: "Are you all right?" greeted the awaken-
ing of the single sleeper. From head to foot the massive fig-
ure was the perfect embodiment of alien nightmare.

Despite the isolation, he could hear some con-
versation outside the door to his cubicle. There were high-pitched
whistles that passed for screams, followed by the muted
whisper of running feet and loud, anxious conversation.
Querulous mouthfuler clicks filtered into his quarters from
the corridor outside as if it had been invaded, and was being
assailed by a horde of migrating carnivorous intruders from
Trix.

Raising his upper body off the sleeping bench he
whispered in the direction of the cubicle's surface. The aerial
pickup worked to his. "Projective intrusion noted. Persistent
uncontrolled, emotional stability test acknowledged.
Returning to sleep." When no further vocals were forthcoming
from the deeply occupant of the room, the sniffer winked
red, having duly made note of Desvendap's terse report.

Glancing to his right, he saw that the forbidding fig-
ure had vanished. The projection really had been well docu-
mented as he drifted back toward unconsciousness. Had he
been confronted with it the previous year he undoubtedly
would have joined the others who had been assailed with the
same nocturnal visitation in scrambling in panic for the cor-
ridor outside his cubicle. But he was not the same individual
he had been then. He knew more now—a great deal more.
That acquired knowledge was reflected in the calm with
which he had confronted the figure, and in his ability to
return readily to a state of uninvolved repose.

Following the daybreak meal the four fellow travel-
ers were called away from the other passengers to a private,
secured conspectus session in a spacious morning chamber.
Warm earth tones dominated the décor, and the walls exuded
the familiar fragrance of tanned earth and decomposing
vegetation. The two senior researchers who debriefed them
were especially intrigued with Desvendap's laconic reac-
tion to the finely rendered three-dimensional imaging of the
previous night.

"You did not panic when confronted with the
human visualization," the elder, a female, declared almost
accusingly. "To greater and lesser extent, your colleagues
did."

Des was aware that this time not only *they* but the
two scientists were watching him carefully. Had he stepped
too boldly outside his carefully constructed identity? Should
he too have run out into the hall whistling in fear and panic?
But he had been awakened from a sound sleep and had react-
ed, not as a false persona, but as himself, bringing into play
all the knowledge he had acquired in the past year. He could
only hope that it would not mark him so singularly as to
prompt a probe from which this time he might not emerge
unscathed.

Realizing that the longer he delayed responding the
greater the likelihood of suspicion permeating the minds
of his interrogators, he replied succinctly, "I saw no unrec-
onizable reason for alarm."

A slightly younger male questioner spoke up
sharply. Desvendap wondered if in addition to being
recorded, this encounter was also being broadcast to and
studied by an unknown number of other suspicious profes-
sionals.

"An armed alien of considerable size and menacing
aspect appears without warning in your sleeping quarters in
the middle of the night, waking you from a deep rest, and
instead of panicking you immediately recognize the intrusion
as suspicious, react accordingly, and go back to sleep. How
many threats do you think would react in such a fashion?"
Awaiting his response, every antenna in the chamber was
inclined in his direction. He hoped he was not emitting a
strong odor of concern.

"Probably very few."

"Probably not more than a handful." The female's
tone was sharp, incisive but without overtones of anger. "An
accident food preparator from Willow-Wane would not gen-
erally be accounted a member of that group."

Subdued light glided off the curve of the male's eyes. "How
did you recognize so quickly that the intruder was a projec-
tion, and therefore posed no threat to you?"

"From his clothing." This time Des replied promptly
and without hesitation.

The interrogators exchanged a glance and passing
antenna contact. "Every effort was made to ensure the
verisimilitude of the human's appearance. What was wrong
with his clothing?"

"There was nothing wrong with it. At least," the
poet hastened to add, "nothing that I, based on my own pri-
vate studies of humans and their habits and accoutrements,
could see."

"Then why did you react so calmly?" the male
pressed him. "What about the appearance of the manufacturer's
stare told you that it could not be real?"

"There was too much of it." Des felt safe in uttering
this statement. Humans thrive in a climate of comfort-
ably less heat and one-third the humidity that desert enjoy.

They can endure what we consider optimum living conditions, but they are not comfortable in them. And when we would regard as an excessive but tolerable climate could prove fatal to even well-adapted humans." Feeling more confident, he shifted easily on the seating bench.

"The temperature in my quarters was, if anything, set slightly warmer and moister than usual to accommodate my personal sleeping preferences. The bipedal figures were not less than two layers of heavy human clothing. According to my studies, no human—no matter how well acclimated to Willow-Wane or Hiveborn or any thrana world—would voluntarily wear a fourth as much apparel. Its system could not tolerate it for more than a time-part or so without suffering serious overheating. Yet the figure that woke me from my sleep did not appear even slightly inconvenienced by the microclimate in my room. The characteristic cooling condensation known as sweat was not present on its skin at all." He looked from his interrogators to his colleagues. "That's how I knew it couldn't be a real human."

The thranists looked briefly at their scribblers before the female replied. With a trunisk she indicated not suspicion or accusation, but admiration. "You are observant beyond your station, Desvendarup. It is no wonder you were chosen to participate in as significant an undertaking as this. He hastened to demur. "I have always tried to learn everything possible about any task I was involved with, whether it concerned food preparation or anything else. The simulacrum could have fooled me. It just happened that I was studying that section provided to us that deals with human physiology only last night—day, and remembered it right away. It was at the front of my memory."

"A fine memory," she complimented him. "I would let you prepare my food anytime." Indicating that their involvement in the meeting was concluded, she and her companion rose and left the room. Their place was taken by four new officials, one of whom had two full cranial lobes inset into her right shoulder.

Desvendarup leaned toward Rly and whispered. "I wonder what we have done to deserve the attention of so much rank."

"I don't know." She was grooming an antenna, bending it forward and down with her left trunisk and running the sensory organ delicately through her mandibles. "You certainly elevated yourself in the project's estimation with your actions last night."

"I was lucky." Using a surreptitious footband, he stroked her upper abdomen. Her ovipositors reacted with a slight quiver. Easy enough to be nonchalant in the presence of a projected simulacrum. Next time I will probably be the one who isn't screaming."

"Somehow I don't think so." She would have said more, but the first of the newly arrived ranking elders was speaking to them.

"You four will be joining and participating in what many crits have dubbed the most important social experiment in thrana history. As you know from your studies, ever since contact was first made we have found these bipedal mammals to be at once fascinating and frightening, refreshing and appalling, useful and dangerous. They are an aggressive, invasive species that exhibits a disturbing tendency to act before thinking. More often than you might expect, this produces results that are not to their benefit. Yet they will plunge blindly on, sometimes even when they are aware that what they are doing is detrimental to their own cause. It has been theorized that they have too much energy for their own good."

"Based on our initial contacts with them they are, I am pleased to report, not fond of our old friends the Aarn. But neither are they openly antagonistic toward them. Their attitude toward us is characterized by an unreasonable, irrational fear of the antemobile small arthropod that inhabits their own world, against which they have been waging a war not merely for dominance but for survival since they acquired the first stirrings of sentience. Our physical appearance was therefore something of a shock to them, from which only the most intelligent and responsive of their kind have managed to

recover. Progress in advancing relations has therefore been much slower than either government would like. Yet in such matters risks outweighing the more conservative among our own kind while simultaneously activating the latent xenophobia that is regrettably endemic among the vast majority of humans."

"Overall, their present attitude toward us might best be characterized as a suspicious ambivalence. It is hoped that this will correct itself with time. In the interim, various proposals have been put forth, by both sides, for different means of accelerating the process of contact."

"The project," the meteorologist pointed out.
"Yes." It was the two-star who responded. "Everyone who wants to be or needs to be—human as well as thrana—on familiar with the project and its estimable goals." Her great golden eyes lingered individually on each of the four designates. "What is not known except among the highest representatives of both governments is that a similar project has been established elsewhere."

"The need for secrecy is absolute," a third supervisor commented tersely. "As suspicious and mistrustful as the humans are of us, it is believed they would react in a manner most unfriendly to the revelation that got simply a contact post, but the beginnings of a real colony were being established in their midst."

Desvendarup was not sure he had heard correctly. The thrans had begun establishing colonies on habitable worlds generations ago, but to the best of his knowledge they had never tried to situate one on a world already inhabited by another intelligent species. The idea of establishing a fall-blown hive on a human-occupied world was more than daring. Many would call it foolhardy.

Yet he sensed this was not a test, as the simulacrum of the previous night had been. The supervisors were as serious as a pregnant female about to lay.

"Which world?" the engineer asked. "Cortaxar Five, or one of the other Centaurion spheres?"

"None of those." The two-star was speaking again. If possible, her manner was more serious than before. "It is to this colony that you have been assigned. It is there that you will be working, often in closer quarters with humans than any thrana anywhere else. Nothing of this kind has ever been attempted before. You will be part of a pioneering interspecies social experiment." Lifting a scribber, she flicked a control on the panel. A fully featured three-dimensional globe appeared in the air between supervisors and incipient colonists.

"The great majority of humans are unaware of it, and if everything goes according to plan they will remain so for quite some time, but there is even as we speak an expanding thrana presence here, growing and thriving with the help of a few dedicated, farseeing humans."

As she spoke the global image rotated before them, the view zooming in and out at the whim of the controller. It was a beautiful world, Desvendarup thought, swarming beneath its arcs of thin white clouds. Not as beautiful as Hiveborn, or even Willow-Wane, but except for the prevalence of large oceans, an inviting planet nonetheless. He wondered which of the human-colonized worlds they were seeing, wondered what the state of their destination might be.

The one supervisor who had not spoken yet now stood back on all four trunks and proceeded to enlighten, elucidate, and explain.

"Barrowers, fellow hive pioneers, future colonists, here is your destination. I extend to you all an early welcome—to Earth." Tanning, he articulated somewhere mixed with humor. "After all, if the humans can be allowed to have a colony on Hiveborn, why should we not have reciprocal privileges on their homeworld?"

To be published in its entirety

by Del Rey in June 1999.